

Master Thesis in International Relations

Beyond Sustainability: Movements, Internal Colonialism, and the Green Transition in the case study of Sardinia.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of resistance to green energy development in marginal regions, using Sardinia as a case study. As climate action grows more urgent due to environmental and geopolitical conditions, demand for renewable energy projects has multiplied rapidly. Sardinia is a region of Italy that has historically suffered dynamics of exploitation within the national context that can be interpreted through the lens of internal colonialism. Currently, local movements in opposition to large-scale green infrastructure are growing on the island. This research aims to understand why these movements mobilize against renewable energy projects and how their actions shape the prospects of a just transition.

While existing literature has addressed environmental resistance in postcolonial contexts and explored the dynamics of internal colonization separately, there is a lack of scholarship examining how green energy projects intersect with internal colonial dynamics. This thesis addresses that gap by analyzing how Sardinian activists frame their resistance, as they call for what they often refer to as “decolonization”, despite the island not being a colony in the legal sense. Environmental justice, democratic inclusion, but also workers’ rights and antimilitarism are intersecting aspects of the movements’ cause for action. Through the combined lens of Postcolonial theory and Resource Mobilization Theory, the project examines how historical grievances shape the reasons and actions of movements that question the green transition.

The study relies on qualitative analysis of movement discourses, media coverage, and online activism. It reveals that Sardinian opposition is rooted in long-standing patterns of imposed development, economic neglect, and cultural erasure. While movements demonstrate strong symbolic and discursive power, they fall short when it comes to coordination, funding, and long-term strategy. The application of Resource Mobilization Theory revealed some of the movements’ limitations. Their activism on social media, particularly Facebook, serves as a key tool for rapid communication and information. However, the tone, quality of communication, and outdated aspects of their digital presence may undermine how their messages are received by the broader public. Although the movements explicitly address those who advance “Not In My Backyard” accusations as detractors, these weaknesses can undermine the perceived legitimacy of their resistance.

By situating the case of Sardinia among those of other postcolonial settings, this study helps contribute to debates on environmental justice. It offers insights into how sustainable development can gain from the interaction between bottom-up movements and institutions who have a shared goal of achieving a just transition.

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Introduction

This research is centered around understanding movements that critically interrogate the dynamics of power that are connected to the realization of contemporary green energy projects, and their mobilization's impacts on the green transition. It looks at groups who mobilize in opposition to the implementation of green energy projects, particularly within regions that are peripheral, through the case study of the island of Sardinia in Italy. This study involves the concept of internal colonization, a framework traditionally used to describe the unequal treatment of marginalized regions by centralized state powers. In light of this basis, the project addresses a specific gap in the literature. There is a growing body of literature on environmental resistance to green energy projects, especially where such projects threaten local livelihoods or ecosystems in postcolonial settings. On the other hand, a separate body of work explores resistance to central governments in contexts of internal colonialism. However, little attention has been paid to resistance against green energy initiatives within the context of internal colonialism. In other words, although it is recognized that oppressive dynamics can exist both in energy development and in internal colonization, the intersection of the two remains underexplored. This gap is particularly problematic because it touches on a key tension of our times: the urgent need for sustainable solutions to the climate crisis must be balanced with the equally urgent need for social and environmental justice. If green energy development replicates historical patterns of exploitation, it risks undermining its own legitimacy. Consequently, the lack of acceptance and cooperation from citizens can become an obstacle to the green transition.

This project addresses this gap through a case study of Sardinia, an island region of Italy historically subjected to internal colonial dynamics. Arguably, Sardinia has been treated as a resource frontier, militarily, economically, and now ecologically. While a lot has been written about Sardinian movements resisting military and economic domination, little attention has been given to contemporary movements opposing green energy projects on the island. This issue is particularly relevant today, as it intersects with debates around NIMBYism ("Not In My Backyard"). Throughout this project, it will be examined how Sardinian movements perceive green energy projects and why they reject the characterization of their resistance as NIMBYism, through the question of:

Why do movements in Sardinia advocate against proposals for green energy, and how does this mobilization impact sustainable development?

The relevance of this project lies in its ability to highlight a complex terrain of struggle where

demands for climate action and calls for “decolonization” intersect. By centering the voices of those resisting green energy projects in Sardinia, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of what a truly just transition must entail. It also opens a broader normative discussion on the conditions under which green energy initiatives can either perpetuate colonial dynamics or foster genuinely sustainable and equitable development.

This introduction is followed by a theoretical chapter that outlines the key concepts that this study is framed through: Postcolonialism and Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), and explains how they are operationalized in the analysis. In line with Postcolonialist framework, this project also adds to the literature that challenges the view of “North/South” and “Western/ non-Western” of the world as geographic indicators of economic and political privilege (Mohanty, 2003). After the theory chapter, two background sections contextualize Sardinia’s socio-political landscape, historically marked by external domination and internal marginalization, and examine specific cases of opposition to green energy projects. Through qualitative analysis of movement discourses and practices, the project traces how calls for decolonization are articulated in relation to contemporary environmental struggles. The final chapters move beyond descriptive analysis towards a normative discussion with the question of sustainable development: under what conditions can green transitions be truly just, and how can we prevent opposition to it? In this manner, the project aims to contribute both to the theoretical field of environmental justice and to practical debates on how to pursue sustainability without sacrificing local autonomy, dignity, and rights.

Methodology

This chapter specifies the methodological approach adopted for this study. It discusses the research design, methods of data collection, and provides the reasoning behind the methods that are chosen to drive the analysis section. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the research design and their implications for the outcome of the study.

Ontology, also recognised as the "theory of being", addresses the foundation of the nature of existence, asking a question along the lines of "what is the world made of? What objects do we study?" (Kurki and Wight, 2013). This research deals with social movements in postcolonial contexts, examining how they mobilize resources while navigating power structures. On an ontological level, this paper therefore adopts a critical realist approach. In international relations, critical realism is a meta-theory that identifies the deeper structures that shape social phenomena (Luongo, 2020). In the

context of Sardinia, the structures which are taken into account, can be represented by historical power dynamics, such as a pattern of economic inequality. Critical realism is therefore a layered approach that differentiates between the tangible aspects, such as resources, and the underlying social relations that enable those resources to be accessed and used towards positive, long-term change (Luongo, 2020). Critical realism is chosen as a fundamental element of this research, because it enables a normative discussion. It uncovers and challenges hidden or underlying structures, providing a ground for changes in a system (Luongo, 2020).

Epistemology asks a question around "how do we come to have knowledge of the world?" (Kurki and Wight, 2013). This study focuses on how movements mobilize, interpret power, and construct narratives, therefore the epistemology is interpretivist. Interpretivism is an approach that studies actors by also understanding beliefs and reasons behind their actions (Kurki and Wight, 2013). Accordingly, this research adopts qualitative methods that allow for a deep exploration of subjective meanings, historical contexts, and power structures. In terms of research design, the analysis will focus on the case study of green energy projects in the island of Sardinia. By examining the resistance efforts of social movements, the research explores how these groups interpret power structures, and how they mobilize. The study is structured around the aforementioned two theoretical lenses of Postcolonial Theory and RMT. The authors of Postcolonial Theory, Bunk (2019), and Kohn and McBride (2011), identify the underlying grievances of movements, particularly in relation to historical marginalization. The internal colonization point of view is shown through the contribution by De Coss-Corzo (2023). The RMT framework, by McCarthy and Zald (1977), and Jenkins (1983), investigates the concrete ways in which these movements organize, access resources, and form alliances to achieve their long-term objectives of socio-political change. The choice of theories lies in the need to find tools for an in-depth exploration of the case, which takes into account both historical and structural factors and the practical mobilization strategies used by the movements. Further, the Postcolonial framework provides a way to look at resistance to green energy projects on a broader geopolitical level. This situates the case study of Sardinia within a broader context, with the goal of reflecting on the complex reality of balancing sustainability goals and the use of land.

This research uses methods of data collection that can be categorized as qualitative. Particularly, this paper is based on content analysis. Such methods can be used with the goal of understanding how social movements form opinions and communicate them. The analysis revolves around five main movements: Associazioni Riunite - Contro la speculazione energetica [United Associations- Against energy speculation], Coordinamento Gallura contro la speculazione eolica e fotovoltaica [Gallura Coordination against wind and photovoltaic speculation], Comitato Su Entu Nostu [Our Wind

Committee], Comitato di Difesa del Territorio - No Thyrranian Link [Committee of Territory Defense - No Thyrranian Link], and OrthobenEssere [Ortobene Wellbeing]. These groups were selected from a larger pool of movements, and chosen based on their activity level in the media. The number of followers and individuals involved in these groups also played a role in their selection over smaller groups. Within the case of Sardinia and local movements' aversion to green energy projects, spokespersons often engage in public discussions which are available online, in the form of interviews, posts, blog entries, and social media posts. The types of sources analyzed in this project include articles from local and national newspapers. Among the sources, the Sardinian newspaper "L'Unione Sarda" is cited, as well as "Sardegna che Cambia", and its national counterpart, "Italia che Cambia". Since discussions on the issue are also available on blogs, this paper draws on them to support the analysis. A detailed overview of the contents analyzed in this project, sorted by themes, is available in the appendix. The case of Sardinia is chosen because of how movements' spokespeople perceive the exploitation of land as an issue that urges for "decolonization", despite the region not being a colony in a formal sense, and how this perception intersects with the green transition. This paper uses multiple resources to understand what prompts some movements in Sardinia to frame the island's relationship to the mainland as a dynamic of internal colonialism. The criteria used to select sources include relevance, date range, accessibility. Particularly, when it comes to date range, the availability of sources made it possible to narrow down the selection to content posted very recently, as the movements have been active starting in 2022.

The approach chosen to analyze the data is that of thematic analysis informed by the theoretical frameworks of Postcolonialism and RMT. The material collected is organized in categories through the identification of recurring themes. Particularly, the topics investigated in the analysis section include:

- Historical grievances and power dynamics: economic marginalization of Sardinia by mainland Italy
- Demand for involvement of civic society in the decision-making processes
- Perception of the green transition

These three themes pertain closely to the Postcolonialist framework. "Decolonization" of the land of Sardinia is a recurring slogan for the movements analysed. Its declinations touching on power dynamics between the island and the mainland, and economic marginalization of the former, have an impact on framing and opposition to green energy projects. These themes are also closely linked to the first part of the research question, investigating how the movements perceive the green transition. On the RMT approach to the problem, the themes which are taken into account are:

- Mobilization: practical aspects, obstacles and organization
- External alliances with other movements and political actors
- Future visions and long-term goals

RMT will be used to analyse how the movements taken into account organize and advocate in terms of financial and human resources. Further, in line with RMT, it will be shown what the role of external alliances is, and what the movements perceive as obstacles to their wished outcome. Finally, the plans that the movements lay out for the future will be mapped, in order to understand where the movements stand with regard to long-lasting change. The analysis is conducted through theory-driven coding. This method is also known as “deductive coding”, and it describes how the chosen theoretical frameworks guide the data categorization and interpretation. Although for structural reasons, the frameworks appear to be separated, Postcolonialism and RMT are meant to enrich one another, specifically towards a discussion section. The critical nature of Postcolonialism, and the pragmatic nature of RMT ease the reader into a normative discussion, where the focus shifts from what is (the current state of affairs) to what the course of action should be. After analyzing the movements in Sardinia through postcolonial and RMT lenses, one could ask: what does a just green transition look like in Sardinia? And how should local movements and institutions interact in the future? In this study, a normative discussion can be a section consequent to the analysis because it moves beyond the descriptive examination of the case study of Sardinian resistance to green energy projects. While the empirical research sheds light on how and why these movements mobilize, the normative discussion allows for an exploration of what should be done to ensure that green transitions are just and inclusive. This normative approach, therefore, helps situate the findings within real-world implications, offering insights on policy recommendations and ethical frameworks that can guide future green energy initiatives in a way that respects local autonomy and addresses historical injustices.

A few key limitations of data and methods can be identified and should be addressed. In this manner, limitations can also be a tool to narrow down the scope of the project. Firstly, it was not possible to carry out interviews. This limitation precludes the ability to ask clarifying or follow-up questions where needed, as well as a more nuanced and personal telling of the reasoning behind movements’ members’ actions. However, the availability of interviews carried out by other researchers and journalists reduces significantly the cost of this fault. In terms of what could have been incorporated into the study but has been ultimately left out, there could have been an analysis of legal frameworks. This is because while the project focuses on Sardinian resistance, green energy is inherently a regulated issue, both on a national level and on an international level. In Italy, a Piano Nazionale di Transizione Ecologica [National Plan for Ecologic Transition] is a strategy put into place in order to

comply with the European Union's Green Deal. The goal of these plans is that of ensuring sustainable development of the planet through social, environmental, political, and financial measures. The Italian government, in line with the EU, envisions objectives of carbon neutrality, no pollution, adaptation to climate change, and preservation of ecosystems (Ministry of Environment and Energy Security, PTE, nd.). Engaging more explicitly with policy discourses around green energy in Sardinia, or in Italy as a whole, could have shown whether or not the central government is aware of the issues, and if they are responding to this opposition. However, it was decided that it was more appropriate to focus on the movements' organization and perception of the issue. This decision is linked to the gap in literature. Studies on climate change from a legal standpoint are abundant. These are studies that focus on compliance with the law, which is ultimately not the goal of this study. This paper focuses on the motives behind potential obstacles to the green transition, and on the ways movements that oppose green energy projects mobilize and visualize a sustainable future. This is also why the specific theories of Postcolonialism and RMT are employed. The use of media coverage and sources can present a potential bias: representation can be shaped by editorial bias, access, or ideological framing. However, for this reason, the sources interpreted are varied as much as possible to ensure a nuanced view on the subject without sacrificing that the center of this study is the movements' perception of the green transition. As the author of this project is Sardinian, sources in Italian could be translated. When it comes to social media content, although the data is publicly available, considerations regarding privacy have been taken when analyzing the data. For example, usernames are not disclosed, and direct quotes are anonymized unless they are from public figures or official statements.

Theory

This section outlines the theoretical frameworks guiding the analysis of social movements opposing green energy projects in Sardinia. The two theoretical frameworks applied in this study are Postcolonial Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT). These perspectives explain the underlying grievances and historical context of the movements and provide a foundation for understanding their operational strategies. By integrating Postcolonial Theory and RMT, this project operationalizes both frameworks to analyze not only the grievances rooted in legacies of exploitation but also the concrete actions that Sardinian movements undertake to mobilize for change. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play, examining the historical context but also the practical strategies these movements employ to achieve their future and long-term goals.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is a critical perspective, which focuses on power relations of a cultural and economic nature (Bunk, 2019). It critiques the lingering imbalances of power after formal decolonization and how these relations shape new societal interactions. Consequently, Postcolonialism is an approach that highlights the importance of bottom-up action, by calling for a shift in the actions of the governed. According to postcolonialism, a mere change in regime tends to offer no hope for long-lasting change without a shift that encourages popular sovereignty (Kohn and McBride, 2011). This theory is directly relevant to this project, which focuses on movements, their objectives for long-lasting change, and their demands toward institutions. Postcolonialism can address the impacts of colonialist legacies on decolonized societies. This can be achieved by analyzing aspects of said societies, such as use of land for the establishment of infrastructure, or more broadly by looking at how power structures are shaped when it comes to decision-making. In this project, Postcolonialism helps frame how these movements emerge as responses to the lasting effects of colonial power structures, both in terms of cultural subordination and economic exploitation. It emphasizes that without addressing colonial legacies, such as unequal power dynamics and systemic marginalization, movements demanding change are unlikely to succeed in creating long-term structural shifts. In the context of the island of Sardinia, a critique of colonial power structures cannot exist without an actualization of the meaning of "internal colonialism." Internal colonialism is described as the persistence of forms of oppression or power subordination within a non-colonial nation-state, a situation that can be recognized by looking for specific red flags such as resource exploitation, labor exploitation, uneven resource distribution, historical context, and racialization (De Coss-Corzo, 2023). An internal colonialist practice of exploitation refers to the usage of resources in a way that makes marginalized spaces economically dependent on and even dominated by more powerful urban centers. For example, this can manifest through the practice of extracting materials from rural areas but sending said materials to urban hubs to process and export, leaving the rural area with no autonomy and no economic remuneration. Additionally, this can involve the exploitation of cheap labor (De Coss-Corzo, 2023). Unequal distribution of resources can also result in polarized outcomes, where certain groups benefit from the labor of marginalized communities (De Coss-Corzo, 2023). This relates to the case of Sardinia, as scholars have theorized that the region is indeed experiencing internal colonialism through the exploitation of its natural resources, with economic benefits flowing to urban centers on the mainland or other wealthier regions of Italy (Mattu, 2013). Sardinia, as a rural and less developed area, may be

subordinated to these urban hubs that control how its resources are used, reinforcing the island's economic dependency and underdevelopment. By applying Postcolonial theory critically, it can be examined how these dynamics are perceived to perpetuate economic inequality in Sardinia. In this context, it will be analyzed how the movements frame green energy projects as an extension of internal colonialism, in a time when green energy projects are necessary for sustainable development. The specific realities of land use and infrastructural persistence are two heavily relevant aspects for this study. As mentioned, the questioning of norms and critical reflections by the governed in regard to power relations are crucial aspects of Postcolonial change. An additional key factor in social movements is found in the intersecting struggle of race, class, and gender (Bunk, 2019). Around this aspect of Postcolonial theory with regards to the Sardinian case, this study presents a limitation: there is a racial aspect within postcolonialism, and even internal colonialism, that goes beyond the scope of this research, as the complexities of race and ethnicity call for a broader discourse. Southern Italian scholars, particularly southern feminist scholars, tackle the themes of intersectionality within movements that promote equality between the north and the south of the country more extensively (Amenta and Fauzia, 2024). Because the Sardinian case is not one of a colony in a formal sense, the discourse around racism and exploitation of land is not compatible in the same exact way as it is for other Postcolonial settings. However, reflections around ethnicity and other differences between the north and south of Italy, particularly with reference to the island of Sicily are explored by other authors, such as Amenta and Fauzia.

Finally, according to Postcolonialist literature, there exists a dilemma of critique and practice, often characterized by a question of "how to move from critique to 'good' action?" (Bunk, 2019). In other words, if the goal is indeed to reach Postcolonialist objectives, how do movements ensure that a Postcolonialist view does not remain merely theoretical or academic? In this paper, and with regard to this dilemma, it will be investigated how social movements plan on achieving concrete change in the discussion section. The combination of Postcolonial thought and RMT must be carefully navigated in order to allow for a normative discussion, as is the conclusion of this study.

Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT)

RMT is an approach that highlights how many factors and different types of resources cooperate towards the success of a social movement (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). According to this theory, these factors include resource allocation, connection of movements to third-party actors such as other social movements or external supporters, and even the strategies that authorities employ in their attempts to

exercise control over movements (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). This perspective adds to what, at the time of McCarthy's publication, was the more traditional approach to studying social movements and their formation. While grievances and discontent remain significant reasons for social movement activation, RMT, as understood by McCarthy and Zald, adds depth through a recognition of power dynamics playing a role in a movement's success (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Precisely on this assumption, this paper seeks to investigate the reasons behind movements' aversion to green energy projects across the island, starting with grievances that can likely be explained through a Postcolonial lens. Additionally, this research will explore the modalities of action plans employed by these movements, examining how they mobilize resources, establish alliances, and engage with both local and external actors. By doing so, it aims to uncover whether opposition to green energy projects is rooted purely in resistance to exploitation and colonial legacies, or whether movements are also focused on developing constructive strategies to ensure equitable and sustainable development for Sardinia. RMT's core elements include resource acquisition, formal organization, efficient resource management, external support and alliances, and overcoming obstacles (Jenkins, 1983). Tangible assets, such as capital, facilities, and labor, as well as intangible ones like legitimacy and human resources, are equally important preconditions for success (Jenkins, 1983). More specifically, resource acquisition is crucial to movement success, as understood through the lens of RMT. Movements largely rely on a variety of resources, including financial resources, which are necessary for covering operational costs, outreach, and campaign activities (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Human resources, such as volunteers, activists, and organizers, are vital assets to drive the mobilization of supporters and execute activities (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Additionally, logistical resources like access to facilities, communication networks, and transportation enhance a movement's ability to organize and coordinate its actions (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Legitimacy plays an essential role in resource mobilization, as gaining credibility and support from the public and external organizations is crucial to advancing movement goals (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). RMT also emphasizes the importance of formal organization within social movements, often referred to as Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). A centralized structure typically enables more effective resource mobilization and sustains challenges over time. Strong leadership is essential for strategic planning, decision-making, and maintaining organizational cohesion. Developing clear strategies and tactics, while considering political contexts and available resources, is necessary for achieving movement goals. Efficient resource management is crucial for ensuring long-term sustainability and effectiveness (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). As mentioned, movements often gain resources from various sources, including internal members and external supporters, to maximize their collective capacity. Strategic allocation of these resources is essential to balance immediate

needs with long-term objectives. Adaptability is another key factor, as movements must adjust their strategies based on resource availability and changing external conditions (Jenkins, 1983). External support and alliances are also significant for resource mobilization. Movements often rely on what Jenkins refers to as “conscience constituents”, namely individuals or groups who support the movement's goals without being direct beneficiaries, and institutional alliances, including governmental bodies, which provide important resources and legitimacy (Jenkins, 1983). At the same time, RMT acknowledges that movements face obstacles in resource mobilization. Structural constraints, including political repression, limited media access, and inadequate infrastructure, can diminish a movement's ability to gather and use resources effectively (Jenkins, 1983). McCarthy and Zald downplay the importance of grievances, in favor of resource availability which can be modified or expanded. However, more closely aligning with Jenkins' views, grievances, in this project, can be seen as a result of pre-existing structural conflicts that grow stronger as they get legitimized by institutions (Jenkins, 1983). Tilly's perspective on grievances within the context of social movements includes a connection to broader socio-political contexts, influenced by power relations and historical background (Jenkins, 1983). In the American context, collective action is seen as a way of expressing grievances through demonstrations, strikes, and the formation of groups (Tilly, 2017). In this project, RMT serves as a framework to understand the practical aspects of how Sardinian movements organize, acquire resources, and mobilize in their opposition to green energy projects. The application of RMT, can critically analyze not only the movements' grievances, which may be rooted in postcolonial exploitation, but also the strategies they employ to overcome structural barriers, secure external support, and manage resources effectively. The theory helps move beyond simply identifying grievances into a deeper exploration of the tangible and intangible resources that contribute to the success or failure of these movements. In the case of Sardinia, the use of RMT allows for an investigation into how these movements mobilize both internal and external resources to build their resistance. It also facilitates a detailed examination of the formal organizational structures within these movements and how they coordinate their efforts despite external challenges like political repression and infrastructural limitations. Through RMT, this research will also address the role of alliances with third-party actors and external supporters, both of which are critical in the context of Sardinian resistance, as well as the obstacles they face in gathering sufficient resources.

Subconclusion

These frameworks enable a critical examination of both the structural inequalities fuelling the movements' discontent and the tangible actions taken to address these challenges. This dual, comprehensive perspective will contribute to a deeper understanding of how social movements in marginalized regions like Sardinia resist perceived exploitation while aiming for equitable, sustainable development.

Sardinia: an internal colony? Historical experiences of grievances and resistance to the central government

Colonization in the modern era can be defined as a form of conquest that generally but not exclusively involves European States forcing subjugation of indigenous lands in other parts of the world. In particular, within the modern and contemporary time frame, the term "colonialism" refers to imperialist dominance that is characterized by an assumption of cultural superiority by the colonizers. For a territory to become a colony, it often meant that its human and natural resources were exploited in favor of the settlers' development (Kämmerer, Max Planck Encyclopedias of International Law, 2018). While in light of this definition Sardinia cannot be defined as a colony, scholars focus on its socio-economic relationship to the mainland, which shows aspects of Sardinia being an internal colony. The characteristics of an internal colony differ from those of traditional colonialism when it comes to the acknowledgement of its citizens. In this definition, although there persists an unequal distribution of power, the groups of people who inhabit these territories are fully recognized as rights bearing citizens (Mattu, 2013). An internal colony therefore exists within a nation-state that recognizes its prerogatives, but that exhibits colonial characteristics in other ways, including exploitation of economic sources, political dominance, a division of labor that reflects a culturally polarized separation, and heavy reliance on external aid and management of resources (Mattu, 2013). These characteristics relate to the case of the island of Sardinia in many ways. In fact, the most profitable industry based in Sardinia is a high-polluting center of refining imported oil, headquartered in Milan, and therefore managed on the mainland. The industrial estate is daily operated by Sardinian workers while citizens of Sarroch report serious environmental and health issues connected to the proximity to the site. Children living near the Sarroch industrial estate were found to be exposed to higher levels of air pollutants, particularly carcinogenic compounds like benzene, causing DNA damage due to environmental contamination (Peluso et al., 2013). Aside from the pollution and environmental risks forced on both the land and the people, this kind of industry shows another clear sign of internal colonialism: putting dangerous sites in out-of-the-way places, making products that

have nothing to do with the area or its resources (Mattu, 2013). Further aspects that help shape Sardinia as an internal colony include socio-economic marginalization. Disparities between the island and mainland cause the average incomes in the region to be less than two-thirds of those in the north, they cause internal migration, and high dropout rates in education due to the lack of transport systems (Mattu, 2013). A lack in investing towards infrastructure in Sardinia is also responsible for poor healthcare (Mattu, 2013). While a great fraction of the island's economy depends on tourism, luxury tourist areas are privately owned and controlled by outsiders, while locals occupy seasonal, low-paying jobs (Mattu, 2013). As previously mentioned, colonization also involves cultural dimensions. As early as before the twentieth century, around the years of the formation of Italy, government texts portrayed Sardinians as inherently criminal and violent people (Lai and Watson, 2021). Throughout the decades, and especially during fascism, the Italian language and media came to replace Sardinian culture. This standard was enforced by a centralized education system that erased the Sardinian language almost completely for the newest generations (Lai and Watson, 2021). According to the *Acadèmia de su Sardu*, the Sardinian Academy, Sardinian language was formally prohibited for 76 years. Scholar Oreste Pili reports how only in 1999 the Italian State recognized Sardinian as a language and talks about "language genocide" (*Dal proibizionismo ai giorni nostri*, n.d.).

In general, although Sardinia inhabits a strategic geographical site, it has been able to preserve its own tradition and culture throughout centuries (Carta, 2014). This adds to the peculiarity of its assimilation into Italy, aggravating hostilities between islanders and mainland. The colonial pattern that Sardinians condemn most frequently is the one tied to military bases in the region. The pattern exhibited in movements protesting both the Italian government and NATO is larger than that of protests towards green energy projects but may help reveal common factors behind mobilization in both cases: resistance to colonial structures of power, and protection of the land and the people. Sardinia hosts 65% of Italy's military bases despite having only 2.5% of the population (*Le Servitù Militari spiegate semplicemente*, n.d.). Around 374 km² of Sardinian land is used for military purposes, leaving large zones permanently or temporarily off-limits to civilians, including air, land, and sea space, with significant parts used for weapons testing and training exercises. Pollution and health hazards are risks connected to this. "Quirra Syndrome" refers to clusters of cancer cases, birth defects in animals, and suspected exposure to toxic substances near the Salto di Quirra base, due to use of depleted uranium and other harmful materials during testing that may have contaminated soil and air. Furthermore, live-fire exercises are carried out in simulated war zones that are constructed in an ad hoc manner. Other than ethical implications that often lead movements to organize, military basis construction perpetuates external control, and local disempowerment, since the bases were imposed without consent from the Sardinian population. The key agreements were signed between

the Italian central government and the U.S. after the Second World War ended. While military authorities promise that the base will bring a plethora of new jobs for the population, the actual local benefits are minimal. Contracts for supplies and services are mostly awarded to non-Sardinian companies through a reportedly non-transparent process, and many towns near the bases are economically depressed and suffering emigration (Le Servitù Militari spiegate semplicemente, n.d.).

Throughout the decades, Sardinian political parties and activist groups have responded to what they perceive as internal colonialism by the Italian mainland through a variety of political strategies. At the more radical end of the spectrum, left-wing independentist factions such as Indipendèntzia Repùbrica de Sardigna (iRS), A Manca pro s'Indipendentzia (aMpI), Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna (ProgReS), and non-party groups like A Foras have explicitly called out the Italian state's relationship with Sardinia as colonial (Morgan, 2023). These organizations argue that Sardinia has been historically exploited, culturally suppressed, and militarized without the consent or benefit of its people. These groups reject Italian statism and actively organize anti-militarist campaigns against military installations like those at Teulada and Quirra. Their approach is rooted in anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics, and they draw inspiration from other decolonial struggles. They emphasize the revalorization of Sardinian culture and language and advocate for grassroots mobilization, not just institutional power (Morgan, 2023). On the other hand, parties like Rosso Mori and Partito dei Sardi represent a more moderate strand of Sardinian nationalism that embraces the concept of “graduated sovereignty”. They seek to exercise sovereign rights over specific, manageable domains, such as cultural policy and environmental regulation, within the existing Italian framework. These parties aim to participate in regional and national politics, sometimes forming coalitions with unionist or mainstream Italian parties to advance Sardinian autonomy gradually (Morgan, 2023). Because their strategy focuses on what is achievable in the short term, this position is criticized by more radical factions.

Subconclusion

There are several political, social, cultural, and economic aspects that support the idea of Sardinia serving as an internal colony for mainland Italy. Sardinian movements recognize the historical implications from the exploitation of both the environment and human resources of the Sardinian territories and have been organizing against exploitation for decades.

Resistance to green energy projects in other parts of the world

The case of Sardinia represents one of the many realities of postcolonial and internal colonialist critique of renewable energy projects. This chapter provides an overview of a few emblematic cases of resistance of local or indigenous communities towards the green transition. Although each of the cases presented in this section presents its own specificities and differences in context, the common thread of bottom-up action and desire for an equitable sustainable solution is evident. This section is comprehensive of cases in several parts of the world and serves as a broad background in which the case of Sardinia can be situated.

Opposition to green energy projects can be connected to the so-called NIMBY syndrome. NIMBYism is a term used to identify groups or individuals who oppose the implementation of local development projects (Michaud et al., 2008). These instances are usually characterized by some common patterns of lack of trust in financial promoters of projects, concern over risks, insufficient information about advantages, and intense emotional reactions connected to the implementation of initiatives (Michaud et al., 2008). When it comes to green energy projects in postcolonial settings, preexisting literature seems to suggest that the demands of the activists involved in this type of resistance can sometimes go beyond NIMBYism. According to these claims, the relationship between local or indigenous communities and the renewable energy projects they must host is not necessarily smooth, for various reasons. Initiatives related to the UN SDG's prompted an expansion of large-scale projects, consequently causing governments all over the globe to access natural resources. However, these instances can sometimes cause a disrupting of the traditional uses of land, sacrificing communities and biodiversity (Lakhanpal, 2019). According to Lakhanpal, opposing the implementation of such projects is not enough to qualify the instance as a case of NIMBYism (Lakhanpal, 2019). In this case and elsewhere, a reduction in carbon emissions is perceived as a nuanced reality, as civil society organizations call for the necessity of considering land rights and ensuring social justice. This is especially relevant, as SDGs are implemented to generally improve quality of life, by optimizing reliable and long-lasting systems, a healthy environment, and social services such as welfare initiatives, education, and food (Yaffe and Segal-Klein, 2023). Impacts of the transition to renewable energy can be uneven. This is the case in certain territories of Mexico, and especially in the case of The Isthmus of Tehuantepec Wind Energy Megaproject. This project involves large-scale wind energy development by the Mexican government and multinational companies in what is considered one of the windiest places on Earth (Fraga, Patiño and Zárate-Toledo, 2019). The project aims to increase

national electricity generation from clean sources. However, some scholars, with regards to the Mexican case, have challenged the narrative that associate renewable energy with sustainable development by looking at the lack of regional and local community involvement and support in such processes (Fraga, Patiño and Zarate-Toledo, 2019). The opposition's critique from local communities is due to lack of operational transparency, and imbalances in the distribution of costs and benefits, not from objection to the green transition. (Fraga, Patiño and Zarate-Toledo, 2019). Such grievances do not represent an isolated case. Indeed, the study on Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) Project, in Kenya, supports this claim, suggesting that even when renewable energy initiatives are driven by SDGs, they can paradoxically lead to overlooking other key objectives such as poverty reduction, proper education, food security, and gender equality (Yaffe, Segal-Klein, 2023). The LTWP aimed to promote Kenya's renewable energy-based electrification in order to achieve SDG 7. However, local communities felt this process was unfair to their rights, as they kept being underrepresented and vulnerable in front of the government. (Yaffe, Segal-Klein, 2023). The project led to the relocation of Sirima village due to construction hazards, with 161 households resettled. Pastoralist communities experienced limitations on herding due to the turbines, as camels feared the noise, and grazing areas were affected. As a result, a civil suit was filed against LTWP regarding land appropriation and its impact on access to water and cultural sites, with the court recognizing the plaintiffs' right to sue but also considering national benefits (Yaffe, Segal-Klein, 2023). The project highlights the tension between the energy needs of the main centers in the country and the marginalization of local pastoralists and inhabitants who remain socially, economically, and politically neglected. This is a case that proves how historical hierarchical relationships have been preserved, ultimately posing a threat to the advancement of sustainability. Further, in India, a 113 MWh wind power project in the Western Ghats faced local opposition due to conflicts with natural resource-based livelihoods, threatening local agricultural practices and the ecology of the landscape. The expansion of renewable energy projects has to rely on access to natural resources. However, in this case as well as the previous one, this can lead to consequences that have to do with overlapping uses of these resources. The project in question was commissioned in 2008, and it concerned 192 acres of forest land (Lakhanpal, 2019). Studies around this project revealed that its implementation violated the Supreme Court order for an eco-sensitive zone around protected areas (Lakhanpal, 2019). Local communities living near the project did not have access to electricity from it and depended on inadequate grid access, highlighting that state agencies and private firms can sometimes selectively define renewable energy projects as sustainable development, but at the expense of local livelihoods (Lakhanpal, 2019). The analysis of these case studies shows the importance of considering the socio-political context when implementing renewable energy projects. The outcome of the projects can greatly depend on local

community involvement, specifically when it comes to defending land rights and ecosystems. This is particularly true in postcolonial settings, where local communities have a complicated history with their respective central governments. Movements resisting renewable energy projects with these instances in mind can choose to organize and act in several ways. Most often, they will do so through efforts of community mobilization, legal action, advocacy, and cultural resistance (Zárate-Toledo, 2019). According to the study by Zárate-Toledo, these strategies aim to protect local livelihoods, assert indigenous or local rights, and challenge top-down development approaches (Zárate-Toledo, 2019). When it comes to strategies of community mobilization, local communities can form coalitions to raise awareness about the negative impacts of renewable energy projects on their land, culture, and livelihoods (Lakhanpal, 2019). This can be achieved by organizing meetings, workshops, and public forums to discuss concerns and strategies (Lakhanpal, 2019). In the Western Ghats of India, local activists protested a wind power project due to threats to traditional livelihoods and the ecology, influenced by various actors and institutions. Further, movements can opt towards filing lawsuits against developers for violations of land rights, environmental regulations, or lack of consultation. This is the case of the situation in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico (Zárate-Toledo, 2019). Another way movements organize to voice their concerns is through advocacy and lobbying. Resistance movements can participate in public hearings to influence policies, or through collaboration with NGOs to amplify their voices (Lakhanpal, 2019). For example, local activists near Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS) approached the Ministry of Environment and Forests with the help of an NGO, highlighting discrepancies in opinions regarding ecological destruction (Lakhanpal, 2019). Movements can also build alliances with other communities that are affected by projects and governmental measures, or environmental organizations and social justice groups (Lakhanpal, 2019). Finally, movements may find it useful to organize protests and to both raise awareness and disrupt project activities (Zárate-Toledo, 2019).

Subconclusion

The case studies analyzed in this background chapter demonstrate that the transition to renewable energy, while crucial for global sustainability efforts, can reproduce historical patterns of inequality and marginalization, particularly in postcolonial settings. Across different contexts, local and indigenous communities have resisted renewable energy projects when faced with violations of land rights, loss of livelihoods, and exclusion from decision-making processes. These movements show that sustainable development cannot be achieved through top-down approaches that ignore local

needs and histories. Meaningful community involvement, respect for land rights, and socio-political sensitivity are essential keys to ensure that the green transition is truly just. This chapter is based on territories that have a history of colonialism in the traditional sense, but it lays the foundation for the analysis of similar grievances in internal colonialist settings.

Analysis

This chapter will explain how civil society organizations in Sardinia mobilize in opposition to green energy projects. Furthermore, the section looks at how movements can combine their actions with the need for sustainable and equitable solutions. The broader social and political implications of resistance will be explored. The analysis is guided by the central research question that was previously introduced:

“Why do movements in Sardinia advocate against proposals for green energy, and how does this mobilization impact sustainable development?”

The analysis is conducted using thematic analysis, following a theory-driven and deductive coding approach. This method identifies and organizes key macro themes that are based on the conceptual insights of the two theoretical frameworks. In this manner, the chapter examines how movements construct narratives of resistance, why they call for "decolonization", as well as how they perceive power dynamics between the island and the mainland, thus developing concrete strategies for socio-political change.

Overview of the Green Energy Projects that are being contested

Among the green energy projects under scrutiny in Sardinia, the two most frequently mentioned by the groups are the Thyrranian Link and the Nurax.

The Thyrranian link is an infrastructure project led by an Italian electricity transmission operator, Terna. It involves constructing a 970 km high-voltage direct current submarine cable system to connect the Italian mainland with the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. This project has the goal of enhancing electricity reliability nationwide, strengthen Italy's role in the Mediterranean energy network, and support the integration of renewable energy sources. The project has an estimated cost of €3.7 billion, with significant financing provided by the European Investment Bank (EIB). Terna

provides some examples of environmental and cultural considerations which they take into account when designing and implementing the project, regarding preservation of sea environment, archeological findings, and local land and cultural heritage. When it comes to marine ecosystem protection, Terna is pledging to transplant native seagrasses like *Posidonia Oceanica* and *Cymodocea Nodosa*. During preliminary surveys, remains of the Roman-era Cornelius Aqueduct were discovered in Sicily, which Terna plans to reconstruct and exhibit parts of. With particular regard to Sardinia, the Tyrrhenian Link will result in the replanting of over 1,900 olive trees affected by construction activities in Selargius (Cagliari, Sardinia) and Termini Imerese (Palermo, Sicily), ensuring the preservation of local agricultural heritage. According to Terna, the Tyrrhenian Link represents a way through which Italy can meet its energy transition goals, particularly by enhancing renewable energy sources like wind and solar power. The projects also aim to position Italy as a central hub in the Mediterranean's energy landscape (Terna, n.d.).

The Nurax Wind Power S.r.l. project aims to construct a 462 MW floating offshore wind farm in the Tyrrhenian Sea, off the northeastern coast of Sardinia. This project is part of a larger initiative led by actors such as Green IT and Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners (CIP), to develop nearly 3 GW of offshore wind farms in Sicily, Sardinia, and Lazio. These wind farms aim to produce enough renewable energy to power around 2.5 million households, contributing to Italy's decarbonization goals under the National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate 2030. Approved by Terna, operator of the national transmission grid, the solution has gone through a series of impact assessments, including avifauna monitoring, marine environment studies, and archaeological surveys. The project proponent also engaged with local communities through public events, such as conferences, seminars, and university lectures, to promote dialogue and address concerns. The Environmental Impact Assessment (SIA) analyzed and addressed the project's impacts on additional environmental components, including waste management: waste generated during the project phases will be managed, treated, and disposed of using specialized resources, with a focus on recycling to minimize environmental impact. Impacts on population health during construction and operation are expected to be low, with measures in place to minimize disturbances from air emissions, dust, and noise. Studies, including one from MIT, suggest no adverse health effects from living near wind farms. The overall environmental impact of the project is considered low negative in the long term, with many aspects having negligible or positive effects. Positive impacts include improvements in tertiary sectors, economic benefits, and reduced CO₂ emissions compared to traditional power plants. The location of the wind farm far from the coast minimizes visual impacts and interference with maritime activities. The project aims to provide Sardinia with enhanced electricity services and environmental

improvements compared to traditional energy production methods, making it an ecologically sustainable choice (Ministry of Environment and Energy Security, n.d.).

This paper also takes into account instances of general opposition to energy speculation, not necessarily aimed at any specific projects.

Theme 1: Historical grievances and power dynamics: economic marginalization of Sardinia by mainland Italy

One of the key themes emerging from Sardinian resistance to green energy projects is the historical unequal power dynamic between the island and mainland Italy. Due to their economic implications, green energy projects are sometimes met with suspicion. OrthobenEssere is a volunteer organization based around the territory of Mount Ortobene and its valleys around the province of Nuoro. This association looks after the defense and development of this area (Chi Siamo, n.d.), occasionally participating in mobilization efforts that encourage bottom-up action, where local actors emerge in opposition to centralized decision-making. In 2022, OrthobenEssere published an article titled "Il problema dell'eolico in Sardegna", [the problem of wind power in Sardinia]. This article states that Sardinia's production of energy exceeds by far the needs of its population (Il Problema, 2022). The organization provides some data in support of this claim, citing the regional government as the source of these estimated numbers. Orthobene volunteers state that Sardinia produces around 12000 GWh, while consuming only around 8000GWh every year (Il Problema, 2022). Consequently, they report that 40% of the energy produced on the island is being exported elsewhere on the mainland. According to their statements, this percentage is too high, and the imbalance between production and consumption creates a situation of servitude, where the periphery serves the economic needs of the core. This issue is aggravated by the fact that Sardinians, according to the group, do not seem to benefit from hosting the sites of energy production, as household expenses for electricity are higher than the country's average. OrthobenEssere organization members take this exposé further, by asking a question of who truly benefits from the profits of these projects. According to their data, when the benefit of the use of Sardinian land does not explicitly go to the Italian mainland, it goes to other actors that the central government negotiates with, such as multinational companies. The lack of transparency is cited as a clear issue for the group, who writes:

"identifying clearly whom exactly owns the companies [which make profits off these resources] is hard, as they are multinational foreign companies based usually in extra-EU Countries, such as

Singapore, New York, and similar" (Il Problema, 2022).

The movement explicitly denounces the legitimacy of the companies involved in promoting energy projects. They assert that these multinationals lack transparency, as they are driven almost exclusively by financial profits, and the exploitation of the land in Sardinia is described as a transaction between these companies and the central Italian government. This issue around ownership reflects a cultural and economic logic of exploitation, where local populations of the island are excluded from both information and benefits, which are held by the mainland, or even by foreign companies with whom the government negotiates, bypassing the opinion and needs of the island. Moreover, the focus on profit-driven exploitation aligns with themes of extractivism and cheap labor use common to internal colonialism and Postcolonial critique (Bunk, 2019). The tone and language chosen to convey this message appear slightly alarming and imprecise, especially when it comes to the extra-EU countries in the quote. The tone of the text impacts its credibility. A few key words are highlighted in a bold font in the text by OrthobenEssere: "foreign", "profit", and "financial speculation" (Il Problema, 2022). These few key words emphasize two themes that can be understood through the lens of Postcolonial theory. The economic exploitation of a less developed area, such as Sardinia, raises a question of inequality that prompts bottom-up action, for example, through this volunteering organization. The practice of exploitation can also be understood as a common dynamic of internal colonialism. Specifically, it results in inadequately rewarded labor, and production of energy in rural areas, with the goal of other receivers benefiting from those resources elsewhere. According to internal colonialism theorists, the mobilization of a marginalized community towards a demand for change can be enhanced by the repetition of historical patterns of exploitation (De-Coss Corzo, 2023). In the same way, the OrthobenEssere organization continues to recall the memory of the repetition of historical events, particularly those of the XIX century, following the unification of Italy. Here, invoking historical grievances not only frames the contemporary objections in a longer lineage of exploitation but calls for deeper structural change, which some theorists link to processes of decolonization. The article quotes Giuseppe Dessì, specifically looking back at a time when Sardinia was a ground for deforestation, as the mainland's demand for wood grew along with the new industrial complexes. Giuseppe Dessì wrote about the power dynamic between mainland and Sardinia that *"the piemontese-based Government did not care about the preservation of the forests, Sardinia was kept as a colony to exploit, especially after the unification of the Kingdom"* (Il Problema, 2022). The writers chose to report a quote that proves that there is a history of using the term "colony" in reference to Sardinia. The words of Dessì, and, later on, of Antonio Gramsci, represent an effective way for OrthobenEssere to legitimate their claims, which appear to have historical grounds dating back to the

very dawn of the country. Indeed, immediately after quoting Dessì, a passage from Gramsci is cited, stating: *"to people on their knees, few money feel like salvation"* (Il Problema, 2022). These choices of words highlight the systemic nature of subordination and how economic desperation can undermine local autonomy, which again finds an explanation in Postcolonial dependency theory (Bunk, 2019). The passage is introduced by a sentence which reports how Sardinians at the time did not resist adequately to the deforestation, the word "resistance" being in bold letters, along with Gramsci's name. This rhetorical choice further reinforces the idea of the importance of "bottom-up action" (Kohn and McBride, 2011) and the call to reclaim agency. According to OrthobenEssere, exploitation of natural resources is nothing new, but bottom-up action and mobilization must be stronger than it was in the past. Today, exploitation of land looks different. The practice of deforestation implied a loss of flora. Today, what is mostly brought up is the damage to flora (such as the olive trees in Selargius), the marine fauna, and the expropriation of agricultural grounds, among others. Referencing the history of Sardinia and quoting two well-known actors in the process contributes to what Jenkins would refer to as legitimacy as an intangible asset (Jenkins, 1983). While Dessì was a novelist, Gramsci's heritage in the fields of political theory and of International Relations gives credibility to the claims of OrthobenEssere, since Gramsci himself devoted part of his writings to the inequalities between Northern and Southern Italy, with special recognition of the case of Sardinia, where he was from (Gramsci et al., 1952).

OrthobenEssere is not the only organization that questions the legitimacy of energy projects. The movement Coordinamento Gallura contro la speculazione eolica e fotovoltaica [Gallura Coordination against wind and photovoltaic speculation], questions the offshore wind turbines project "Nurax" (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025a). The project, which is in its early stages, involves 33 wind turbines parks, each 300m tall, to allocate in the proximity of another preexisting park, that includes 72 turbines and was designed by a company owned by the same group as the one pushing the implementation of the "Nurax" project (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025a). The organization is worried about three specific implications that would follow the implementation of the project: (1) its environmental impact; (2) a threat of erasure of identity; and (3) its toll on the economy in the region. The first concern revolves around the protection of the forests, sea, and historical sites in the area. The second concern is mentioned but not elaborated on in depth in this context. The third concern dwells on the exploitation of resources at the hands of multinational companies. The emphasis on external profits and local losses reflects a pattern of uneven resource distribution, which is an indicator of internal colonialism (De-Coss Corzo, 2023). Due to this wind turbine project, which they refer to as an "appalling facility", Coordinamento Gallura states, the economy of entire municipalities will be "demolished" in favor of multinational companies' profits.

Concluding that the installation threatens beaches and sea, flora and fauna, ecosystems, tourism, and fishing (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025a). Extraction with minimal reinvestment locally can also be seen as an indicator of postcolonial exploitation, where resources are extracted from marginalized spaces to benefit dominant centers. The warning tone of the publications by Coordinamento Gallura contains a clear critique of the way through which decisions that affect people, and the environment are made (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025a).

The long history of external control over Sardinian land and resources, ranging from military bases to high-polluting industries managed by and from the mainland, has led the organization Associazioni Riunite - contro la speculazione energetica [United Associations - against energy speculation] to mistrust as well. According to their statements, exploitation lurks behind the "green" label. Associazioni Riunite tells the tale of underpaid workers employed to build a photovoltaic plant in the area of Tempio Pausania. In doing so, Associazioni Riunite shares a picture that reads *"the race for renewable energy cannot replicate the unjust logics of the past"* (Associazioni Riunite, 2025e). This directly reflects a demand for systemic change that takes workers' rights into account. Moreover, community comments on the post reflect the same sentiment, as a member punctuates the role of the local committee in investigating the poor working conditions on the site, as opposed to the authorities (Anonymous Member in Associazioni Riunite, 2025).

The Comitato di Difesa del Territorio- No Thyrrhenian Link [Committee of Territory Defense – NO Thyrrhenian Link] is a movement that opposes a project that aims to implement an underwater connection between the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, and the Italian peninsula. Although this movement focuses specifically on opposition to the Thyrrhenian Link, it also criticizes other forms of what they call "colonialism" perpetuated by the mainland on the island, posing the issue of the Thyrrhenian Link among a bigger picture of exploitation (No Thyrrhenian Link, 2025a). Specifically, they denounce the ongoing military propaganda on the island. According to this organization, there is no talking about land exploitation without a framing of the issue through historical perspectives that highlight dynamics that they refer to as "colonial". In order to discuss the "colonial" pattern of exploitation and link it to the resistance towards green energy projects, the No Thyrrhenian Link Committee has organized an event by the name of "The Awakening of the Sardinian People Against Colonialism." The event, as they describe it on social media, took place in March of 2025 and was a major success, with very high-quality speeches and contributions. This current "awakening", they state, should be seen in a historical context, and not just as opposition to wind turbines or energy infrastructure like the Tyrrhenian Link, but as a deeper, recurring "resistance" of Sardinian heritage. The speakers of the event emphasize different aspects, including how such intensity and widespread

involvement across the island has not been seen since the post-World War I period. At the event, speakers traced Sardinian resistance through history, from the Carthaginian and Roman periods through to the loss of independence under Aragonese rule. They also highlighted the public health costs of repeated “colonizations” and “military servitudes” in Sardinia with comparative data and spoke about land consumption and the lack of support for farmers and local food cooperatives, contrasting with large subsidies to multinationals. At the event, the nature of the relationship between Italy and Sardinia came up, as it was questioned whether it is one of equality or subordination. The speakers called for political and social actions to assert what the event report calls the “Sardinians’ right to exist” and emphasized using Sardinia’s statute as a foundation for self-governance (No Tyrrhenian Link, 2025a).

Luigi Pisci is an activist from Isili in central Sardinia, and part of a local committee opposing energy speculation on the island. He spoke on the origins of the fight against energy speculation on the island. According to his statements, the struggle began when Sardinia was suddenly overwhelmed with dozens of proposals for massive wind and solar farms, often submitted by shell companies with minimal capital. If implemented, these projects would generate enough energy to power an entire industrialized nation, therefore far exceeding Sardinia’s needs. Pisci argues that this overproduction is meant for export to industrial regions in central and northern Italy, placing the burden entirely on Sardinia (P. Carc Sardegna, 2024). This reflects the exploitative pattern of extracting energy from marginal zones and sending it to economic cores, which is another aspect that can be seen through the lens of internal colonialism (De-Coss Corzo, 2023). Pisci sees this as yet another historical exploitation of the island, comparing it to past events like the deforestation under the Piedmontese during the “chiudende” [enclosures] period in 1820, the establishment of military zones since 1956, and the forced industrialization plans of the 1960s. He argues that, once again, Sardinia is being asked to sacrifice itself for the speculative economic interests of outsiders, disconnected from the true needs of its people (P. Carc Sardegna, 2024).

Subconclusion

The island of Sardinia constitutes a relevant case study for the issue of opposition to the green transition. Unresolved past conflicts between island and mainland, including economic marginalization and a delegitimization of demands, have created a legacy that can be linked to a direct response from the movements, who in turn seek legitimacy and self-determination. The explicit repression of cultural and linguistic aspects of society when Sardinia was assimilated to Italy is also

a grievance that emerges upon closer look to the claims of the movements analysed. The historical inability of Sardinians to protect their language and culture can be linked to their desire of participating more actively in decision making processes which threaten, in their words, their ecosystems and their very identity. The next paragraph will explore the theme of involvement of groups and committees in the decision-making processes.

Theme 2: Demand for involvement of Civil Society Organizations in the decision-making processes

Postcolonial theory emphasizes that achieving genuine self-determination in contexts where certain communities are marginalized, goes beyond merely setting up democratic institutions, and requires a deep transformation of the population mindset (Kohn and McBride, 2011). The theory moves past the conventional focus on democratic institutions and procedures, arguing that these alone are insufficient for real self-governance. Instead, the emphasis is placed on nurturing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for citizens to actively and effectively participate in political life, through a few different ways. Firstly, encouragement of critical thinking involves prompting and enabling individuals to analyze information, question authority, and form their own informed opinions (Kohn and McBride, 2011). Encouraging active participation in civic life, such as voting, community organizing, and advocacy, is also designated to be essential for ensuring that citizens have a voice in shaping their society. In alignment with this viewing of the issue, the case study of Sardinia can be analyzed through a series of statements that movements have made with the common red thread of demand for increased involvement in decision making processes. The case of the Thyrranian Link project can be seen as a case that concerns the environment and the territories which are currently owned and privately used. But it can also be seen, as Ferreli reports, as a way to examine closely how institutions use their powers to make decisions (Ferreli, 2024). In an interview with attorney Giulia Lai, who has been following the issue of the realization of this major project, the sentiment that emerges is one of disheartenment due to the fact that a private company is being allowed to prevail over the interests of a small territory, specifically among the complicit silence of the institutions (Ferreli, 2024). Opposing this green energy project appears to be the only logical option for the No Thyrranian Link movement, as members are concerned about being left powerless, and subjected to external pressure (Ferreli, 2024). The No Thyrranian Link Committee explicitly and often invites citizens of Sardinia to participate actively in dialogue with institutions. For example, in response to a proposal for electrochemical system submitted by a company based in Milan in December 2024, the Committee calls for the people of the Selargius municipality to assemble in front of the site of the

city's administration, to demand that the latter takes strong action against the project (No Thyrranian Link, 2025c). The Committee raises a question that goes beyond the scope of energy justice and even questions the concept of democratic representation as a whole. In a publication made in December 2024, the Committee explicitly endorsed another popular initiative, called the "Pratobello 24". The Pratobello Law of 2024 is a popular regional initiative bill that was initiated by several Sardinian communities with the intent to reclaim control over their territory and energy future. The initiative is inspired by an anti-military popular uprising that occurred in 1968 in Pratobello, during which the Sardinian people of Orgosolo organized to oppose the will of the central government to implement a 12 hectares military base that would have displaced the pastoral communities (Pratobello, n.d.). The Pratobello 24 proposal was launched in response to growing concern over the unregulated spread of large-scale wind and solar plants, which, according to committees, are imposed from outside without the consent or involvement of local people. This law proposes clear rules to govern energy development that are respectful of Sardinia's environment, cultural identity, and economic sustainability (Che cosa propone, 2024). At the heart of the initiative is the broader vision to return decision-making power to local communities, cooperatives, and municipal initiatives where energy is produced, managed, and shared by and for the local population. These decentralized models are fast-tracked under the law, recognizing their potential to create social, economic, and environmental value without sacrificing Sardinia's landscapes. 210,054 Sardinian residents signed in support of this bill, in a significant show of civic action, that exceeded the expectations of 10,000 signatures which was the goal (Pratobello 24, raccolte firme, 2024). The Promoting Committee announced that while the signatures are to be formally delivered to the offices of the Sardinian Regional Government in Cagliari, a public demonstration will take place in front of the regional headquarters, with participation from local committees, activists, and citizens. Pasquale Mereu, who is one of the initiative's key promoters, praises the spontaneous and self-organized initiative, as well as the symbolic message that it conveys: *"The people of Sardinia are demanding to be part of the decisions that shape the future of their land"* ("Pratobello 24, raccolte firme", 2024). The No Thyrranian Link describes this initiative as a necessary expression of bottom-up involvement in the decision-making that shapes choices on the territory. As they put it in this publication, citizens, civil society organizations of political and social matrix are all bound to unite in order to achieve a government that is truly a representation of the island's plurality (No Thyrranian Link, 2024a).

Associazioni Riunite poses a similar question in a publication titled "PNIEC [National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate] disregarded and communities neglected". In this post, the organization shares how PNIEC outlines goals and tools for the energy transition, emphasizing the importance of local participation through public debate, energy communities, and crowdfunding. However, they

state that these principles are often ignored in practice, as hundreds of renewable energy projects are proposed annually without meaningful local involvement of the citizens, and mayors often learn about projects only after decisions have been made. In the post, the association calls for full enforcement of PNIEC's existing provisions on community involvement and for initiating early, constructive dialogue with local communities (Associazioni Riunite, 2025a).

Subconclusion

Fruitful dialogue between communities and institutions is impacted by the values behind the movements. Indeed, many factors can lead groups to form and be active in the context of the green transition. At a time when sustainability goals are brought forward with urgency, it is useful to identify the grievances and opinions that lie behind mobilization against green energy projects. This is the focus of the next paragraph.

Theme 3: Perception of the green transition

Opposition to green energy projects is a complex issue, driven by different values. In explicating the variety of reasons that lie behind skepticism towards green energy projects, organizations often mention their relationship with the green transition in general.

The volunteer association OrthobenEssere starts off their overview of the problem of windfarms in Sardinia with an explicit disclaimer. The disclaimer is placed even before the article's table of content, and it spells out how in the current state of the world and within its evolution, renewable energy represents the *“only real path towards the fight against climate change and to the achievement of energetic independence”* (Il Problema, 2024). The aim of this text is, according to the organization, an attempt to avoid any kind of misunderstanding in their intentions and serves as a preface that encourages readers to read the entirety of the article before engaging in dialogue.

The mayor of Orgosolo, and promoter of the popular initiative Pratobello 24, also states that the intended objective of the proposal is *“not to obstacle the green transition as a whole, but rather to improve the legal framework in a way that is respectful of the environment and in favor of the Sardinian people and not of multinational companies”* (Pratobello 24, raccolte firme, 2024).

Similarly, Associazioni Riunite state upfront in the information box of their social media page, “*Yes to renewable energy, No to mafias and to speculation, No to the destruction of the environment and to new servitude*” (Associazioni Riunite, n.d.). Associazioni Riunite sums up this sentiment through a statement posted along an image that is titled “Transizione EnergEtica”, a play on words on the Italian expressions for “ethical” “energy transition”. The image is accompanied by a text that explores the topic of power and responsibility over resources, in a description that tells of the association’s general perception of the green transition. In the statement, the Association frames the green transition as a phenomenon that is central to today’s fight against climate change. A sustainable transformation is seen by the association as a key aspect of the future, as they describe its effect on energy, but also on an economic and social level (Associazioni Riunite, 2025b). According to their vision of the matter, the activists behind Associazioni Riunite share a list of the most polluting countries in the world, along with some considerations on the responsibility of making the world a more sustainable place (Associazioni Riunite, 2025b). The association is also vocal against “greenwashing”, which they refer to as a misleading practice through which companies present themselves as environmentally responsible without taking real actions to reduce their ecological impact (Associazioni Riunite, 2025e). According to their statement, this tactic has become especially widespread in recent years due to increased consumer demand for sustainability, stricter regulations, and the marketing value of a green image. In the context of renewable energy, greenwashing often involves overstating the benefits of clean technologies while downplaying or ignoring the actual social and environmental consequences. Companies may, for example, buy renewable energy certificates or promote sustainability in ads without making real changes to their operations. In the opinion of the writers of the post, this issue is highly relevant to the case of Sardinia, where local organizations and communities increasingly denounce how large energy projects, presented as “green” or sustainable, often benefit multinational corporations rather than the local population. The association explicitly presents the case of Sardinia as an example of greenwashing, encouraging readers to fact-check data provided by companies with the help of impartial sources. This ties back to the encouragement of critical thinking as an asset for active participation in decision-making processes (Kohn & McBride, 2011). They conclude that greenwashing is not only damaging to consumers, but also to the environment (Associazioni Riunite, 2025b).

Another aspect of the perception of the green transition as understood by the movements analyzed has something to do with the issue of NIMBYism and climate change denial. Associazioni Riunite tackles these issues in a post that revolves around addressing what they describe as twisted narratives and misinformation. They point out that public debate is increasingly being “manipulated” through polarizing discourse that is oversimplified. Among these manipulations, they point out how the

energy question is framed as a binary choice: either support renewables uncritically or be labeled a climate change denier or fossil fuel supporter. This rhetorical device, they argue, delegitimizes nuanced concerns and silences critical voices. (Associazioni Riunite, 2024b). The post further critiques the instrumentalization of the NIMBY label, used to dismiss local opposition as selfish or irrational. In reality, as the association clarifies, communities are not rejecting renewable energy per se, but rather the opaque, top-down processes often involved in their implementation. Their objections focus on the lack of transparency, democratic oversight, and the suspicion that speculative or even criminal interests may be involved. The association also warns against the essentialist portrayal of renewables as unquestionably good, regardless of environmental, legal, or social implications that the individual projects might have. According to them, this narrative ignores key issues such as biodiversity, landscape protection, regulatory loopholes, and local needs. Finally, they highlight the danger of generalizations where isolated extreme cases are used to discredit entire movements, contributing to public stereotyping and polarization. In contrast, Associazioni Riunite calls for a more informed and balanced public discourse, one that supports the development of clean energy but insists it be done transparently, legally, and in collaboration with local communities, rejecting both speculative exploitation and the suppression of democratic participation (Associazioni Riunite, 2024b). The association therefore recognizes the existence of an extreme wing within the movement and suggests that generalization and disinformation is fought through informed dialogue. Associazioni Riunite is not the only actor that explicitly addresses accusations of climate change denials and NIMBYism. A member of Gallura Coordination shares a post on the matter (Anonymous Member in Coordinamento Gallura, 2024). According to this publication, in Sardinia's case, the resistance is not based on a refusal to embrace renewable energy or the green transition itself. On the contrary, Sardinians have consistently expressed support for sustainability, but they demand that the transition be carried out in a way that is participatory, equitable, and respectful of the land and its people. The article addresses how Sardinians are not rejecting modernity, as it is sometimes implied, but questioning how that change is being imposed. These organizations have the goal of avoiding centralized decisions made by national institutions or external private companies, with minimal involvement of local communities. Protesters argue that their land is being exploited to serve national or corporate sustainability goals, while they are left with the environmental burden and few, if any, economic benefits. This pattern echoes historical experiences of marginalization and imposed industrialization, from military bases to mining operations, leaving many islanders wary of becoming once again a "sacrifice zone" for mainland interests.

Subconclusion

From a Postcolonial standpoint, several grievances fuel the mobilization of groups. However, to understand how Sardinian movements sustain their resistance against certain green energy projects, and to understand their full impact on the green transition, it is essential to examine how they mobilize and organize resources.

Theme 4: Mobilization: practical aspects, obstacles and organization

According to RMT, successful movements depend not just on grievances, but on their ability to access and strategically use both material and non-material resources. These include funding, media access, expert knowledge, community networks, and institutional support. While McCarthy and Zald minimize grievances, Jenkins and Tilly highlight how structural conflicts and historical power imbalances shape and intensify grievances (Jenkins, 1983; Tilly, 2017). The previous paragraphs provided an overview of what those grievances look like for the movements that choose to oppose the implementation of green energy projects on the island. In the next section of this paper, the practical aspects of mobilization will be analyzed.

A centralized, formal structure allows for better strategic planning, leadership, and long-term sustainability (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The No Thyrranian Link Committee has a clear structure, which is published on social media platforms. The Committee does not appear to have its own website. As of October 10th, 2024, the Committee's organizational structure looked as follows. The organization appointed one spokesperson and two delegates, Agostino Atzeni, Giuseppe Piras, Francesca Olla. In the same post, the organization emphasizes its goal of unifying Sardinia against what they refer to as *"yet another servitude imposed from above in a colonial manner, without the territories or the Sardinia region having had any say in the quantities of GW to be installed."* (No Thyrranian Link, 2024b). The post clarifies the existence of a formal base for the organization, the headquarters in Selargius, which is listed in the information box at the top of the Facebook page. The post also points out a collaboration with the Presidium. 'S'arrebellia de is olia', which in turn keeps collaborating with all those *"who fight against the new servitudes, in an independent way."* (No Thyrranian Link, 2024b).

The OrthobenEssere organization counts over 30 volunteers, 152 associated members, and seven honorary associates. A list of staff divided by areas of expertise is available on their website, and it

includes a few names who support the organization as President and consulting staff. The association was established in 2005 and is formally recognized both by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia, and on a national level. Everyone regardless of nationality, sex, ethnicity, language, religion, political views and other personal and social conditions can join, inviting constructive allyship for the common goal of preserving the territory of Mount Ortobene. Participating in the growth of this association is possible through contributions of various nature. Volunteering is listed as the first and most important source of enrichment for the association. However, it is also possible to donate any amount of money to this initiative of active citizenship. It is also encouraged to be a supporter of their initiatives by spreading the word on and offline (Orthobenessere, partecipa, n.d.).

Associazioni Riunite does not have a website. On their social media pages, as of May 2025, there appears to be no mention of a physical headquarters to the association. (Associazioni Riunite, 2024c). In a statement published in August 2024, the Associazioni Riunite clarifies that the associations adhering to their union are apolitical, and completely independent. The associations which adhere to the union each have their own history, and they operate in accordance with their own statutes and internal regulations, shared and approved by their respective boards and members. However, the Associazioni Riunite page does not provide, as of May 2025, a list of the organizations in question. The group, as they state, has been active for three years, during which it has submitted, to the competent bodies and institutions, observations and objections against wind farm projects, without any distinction regarding the administrations and political forces in power. One example of this is the endorsement of the Pratobello 24 initiative (Associazioni Riunite, 2024c).

The Su Entu Nostu Committee does not have a website. On the posts they published on their social media pages between June 2023 (when the pages on Facebook and Instagram were created) and May 2025, a few names of coordinators and spokespeople are recurring, but there does not appear to be a clear report of a structure of the organization.

Theoretically, both tangible and intangible resources are needed for a movement to operate effectively and achieve long-lasting goals. Tangible resources include financial aid, facilities, and transportation (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Overall, an analysis of the movements' social media presence revealed that their goals are mainly those of informing citizens and organizing protests. Coordinamento Gallura, for example, sends emails to actors that are involved in decision making for Nurax and encourages followers to raise awareness (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025b). They also raise money by organizing a beach clean-up, recycling the findings into artworks to sell (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025c). Still, in the majority of cases hard to pinpoint what the structure of the single movements is,

who stands behind them, and whether they have a physical headquarters and a clear fundraising strategy.

Overcoming structural constraints is also a crucial aspect of resource mobilization. Movements must navigate barriers such as poor infrastructure (Jenkins, 1983). In the case of Sardinia and the No Thyrranian Link movement, a similar reflection is possible with regards to what was called “Il Presidio degli Ulivi” [the olive trees praesidium], a physical site of coordination for the movement, set in the heart of the affected area of Selargius, which has been dismantled. No longer having the site prompts protesters to look at the lack of a structured physical place for their organization. In a telling statement, they express that “there is no place for the struggle, but it is the idea that counts” (Ferrel, 2024).

Subconclusion

The nature of the group’s grievances and the scope of their mobilization influences the choices of alliances with external actors. Said actors must reflect the same values to some degree, and their involvement in the issue can perhaps shape practical aspects of their organization. This will be discussed in the following section.

Theme 5: External alliances with other movements and political actors

Partnerships with other movements, institutions, or “conscience constituents” (supporters who are not direct beneficiaries) increase resource access and legitimacy (Jenkins, 1983). Consequently, public credibility is essential to gain supporters and institutional allies (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). This paragraph looks at how movements that oppose the implementation of green energy projects in Sardinia perceive alliances, and which kinds of alliances they choose to pursue or reject. The group which is most frequently mentioned as an ally for the analyzed environmental groups, is the anti-militarist Sardinian activists, such as “A Foras”. A Foras is an assembly made up of several groups, collectives, and individuals that fight for what they refer to as “military occupation of Sardinia” (A Foras, Chi Siamo, n.d.). This group can be seen sharing values with Associazioni Riunite against energetic speculation and more movements connected by the link of the exploitation of Sardinian land, in favor of interests that they deem illegitimate. This can be seen, for example, through the

organization's participation in a sit-in organized by several environmental associations, and held in July 2024, where a spokesperson of No Thyrranian Link, Rita Corda, elaborated on the dangers of energetic speculation (Su Entu Nostu, 2024a). The activist Pisci speaks about this link, and connects the surplus in energy production to the exploitation of land in favor of the north and center of mainland Italy. (P. Carc Sardegna, 2024). Pisci also references to the times where deforestation and military servitude raised a similar question in the past two centuries. The Su Entu Nostu Committee shares a post titled *"enough with the energetic speculation and militarization of Sardinia"*, considering a controversial event, the Joint Stars 2025 (Su Entu Nostu, 2025a). Joint Stars 2025 is a major military drill that will be conducted in May 2025. The drill is presented by the government as a charity event involving many initiatives for the citizens to take part in, including health screenings for children (Ministry of Defense, 2025). The events mostly take place aboard the Trieste ship, which is described by the Italian Navy as the biggest ship built after the Second World War, representing an important accomplishment of technological evolution for the Armed forces (Ministry of Defense, n.d.). It was deemed as controversial by several organizations, 62 of which submitted a formal complaint, and an unclear number of others shared their dissent on social media, including Su Entu Nostu. Free pediatric screenings will be available aboard the ship, as the whole event serves as a fundraising opportunity to gift two Intensive Care Unit beds to children. Su Entu Nostu criticizes the event and invites followers to boycott it, considering the propagandistic use of the image of children to mask military operations. Further, the Committee declares itself against the militarization of a territory that has been subjected to years of servitudes, and against the pollution deriving from military drills, and denounces the use of public finances to power up other interests while the government should be providing proper healthcare to citizens. Upon inspection of the event's flyer, the first main partner of the event is the company Terna, contributing to the link between military servitudes and other kinds of servitudes, including the use of land to implement green energy projects. The flyer for the event features a doctor and a child hugging, with a slogan that reads "A gesture as wonderful as a child's smile". Underneath, the flyer shows a picture of the navy ship and descriptions of the events aboard it (concerts and free health screenings for children) (Su Entu Nostu, 2025a). The same post tags two other movements in the field of antimilitarism and peacebuilding, WarFree - Liberu de sa gherra, and Comitato Riconversione RWM per la pace ed il lavoro sostenibile [Committee of RWM Conversion for peace and sustainable work]. Particularly, the second of these two mentioned organizations advocates for peacebuilding and sustainable working conditions, paving the way for the analysis of another frequent link, the one between building green projects and poor working conditions (Su Entu Nostu, 2025a). Associazioni Riunite tackles the issue of unfair working conditions in a post that denounces what they refer to as *"exploitation behind the green label"* (Associazioni Riunite, 2025e).

About thirty workers, mainly of Asian origin, were working in irregular conditions in a construction site for a green energy project in Tempio Pausania, when the local Prosecutor's office revealed a complex scheme based on cascading subcontracts, bypassing national and European regulations on contracts and on the traceability of foreign workers. These workers were not only underpaid compared to the collective agreements in the construction sector, but were also exposed to risks to their health and safety, due to the lack of protective measures required by law. Three foreign entrepreneurs representing three foreign companies, a freelancer, and another entrepreneur were reported, and fines totaling €255,000 were imposed. Associazioni Riunite highlights how, in the case of the implementation of renewable energies, this type of illicit behavior takes on a particularly symbolic connotation, as the sector is charged with a powerful narrative of ethical change, progress, and sustainability. The organization points out how the green energy sector presents an alternative that promises not only environmental benefits but also new jobs. *"It is not just a matter of law violations already unacceptable in themselves"*, they write in a statement on Facebook, *"but of a glaring contradiction that undermines the credibility and moral integrity of the entire process at its core"* (Associazioni Riunite, 2025e). The association questions the notion of sustainability as a whole, raising a question of how we can talk of real sustainability when it is based on labor exploitation. At the same time, they recognize that abandoning fossil fuels is imperative.

The alliance between workers' rights and movements against the exploitation of land is also justified by the fact that the energy transition is portrayed as a source of jobs for the local population. Coordinamento Gallura denounces the same phenomenon, calling for more thorough regulations in construction sites for photovoltaic energy plants (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025d). This applies to working and living conditions of the individual involved, as the local police had discovered that a 100 square meter space was being used as housing for about thirty to forty foreign workers employed at the photovoltaic plants (Fresu and Busia, 2025). The post by Coordinamento Gallura opens with a statement that ironically comments on the real entity of the job opportunities that are promised along the implementation of green energy projects. This remark alludes to the common argument that green energy projects bring jobs to workers on the island, a promise the group presents as unfulfilled (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025d).

In terms of alliances with institutions or other types of factors, Associazioni Riunite makes it clear that they are entirely independent and do not maintain connections with political entities, businesses, organizations in the wind or energy sectors, environmental groups aligned with those industries, media platforms, or multinational corporations. As such, they oppose any efforts to cause division or

to frame their actions in political or ideological terms. “*Our independence is total*”, they state in a Facebook post (Associazioni Riunite, 2024c). Their pledge to other movements, groups, and individuals who are not tied to the government is explicitly stated, as Associazioni Riunite writes that the real challenge for them is that of transforming the energy system of the island of Sardinia in a way that leaves no one behind and in a way that does not invite new forms of exploitation (Associazioni Riunite, 2025b).

Subconclusion

The movements analyzed choose to form alliances with groups that protect the environment and workers’ rights, and groups that oppose military exploitation of the island. On a deeper level, they critique these decisions because they perceive them to be imposed by the central government, by supranational agencies, or even by foreign, multinational companies.

Theme 6: Future visions and long-term goals

The Sardinian opposition points to alternative models for energy development, like small-scale, community-led systems or installations on already urbanized or degraded land, that would allow for both clean energy production and local empowerment. The existence of these viable alternatives undermines the NIMBY label: if better options are available but ignored in favor of profit-driven, large-scale projects, resistance is no longer about selfishness, but about justice.

Associazioni Riunite shares a statement that talks about shared responsibility and what sustainable future consequences look like. According to their line of thought, the energy model matters less than the discussion around the methods, management, and implementation of projects. They point out that the decision makers must go beyond the technological aspects and the superficial “green” label, and instead look at how the economic, legal, and social spheres are affected. In this scenario, they propose a coordinated oversight network among local communities, regional authorities, and the central government. They propose a participatory and transparent governance, with clear rules that are verifiable by all, to reconcile the need for an energy transition with the protection of the environment, the local economy, and the common good, while blocking the path to speculation and criminal infiltration (Associazioni Riunite 2025b);

Through initiatives such as the Pratobello 24, movements suggest several points. Sardinia is, according to the Italian Constitution, an autonomous region, meaning that the local regional government has some prerogatives over the central one. In a detailed law proposal, they propose:

1. Planning and management of the territory of the island are to be reviewed to prevent an imbalanced use of resources between the rural and urban zones. This aims to protect natural areas, zones that are to be preserved under enhancement plans, sites of community importance, and areas subject to strategic and economic planning.
2. Urban planning regulation of areas involved in economic, environmental, and strategic programs of a community, national, or regional nature.
3. Building a renewable energy system just for self-consumption to be carried out on existing structures or designated development areas, to minimize waste.
4. The urban planning regulation of projects in publicly owned areas and buildings, including energy communities promoted by public administrations, with the possible participation of private industrial partners to be selected through a public tender process, following current regulations. (Che cosa propone Pratobello?, 2024)

Coordinamento Gallura also proposes that the local governmental institutions be more attentive to this issue. In the case of the Nurax project, they denounce the lack of participation of many of the municipalities involved in the project (Coordinamento Gallura, 2025c).

The organization of OrthobenEssere proposes a critical review of the regulatory framework behind the green transition, one that is transparent and ensures that the main goal of achieving sustainable goals is reached instead of being contested. In order to avoid speculation, Orthobenessere proposes the employment of a mandatory bank guarantee to cover all steps of the implementation of the project, including its eventual disposal. This should act as an incentive only for companies that are truly interested in proposing ethical and sustainable projects to get access to land use and discourage initiatives lacking robust economic foundations. They also propose that, to facilitate transparency, public tendering procedures are put in place to assign land, a procedure that would encourage equal opportunities for all companies. Additionally, selection through competitive tenders would help identify the most suitable sites and adopt the most efficient technologies, thereby optimizing the entire development process. OrthobenEssere criticizes how the decision regarding site selection for the installation of wind turbines remains in the hands of private companies rather than public entities, and proposes a model similar to other European countries, where all regions contribute to national energy production based on their energy consumption, while also promoting energy savings in line

with the "Energy Efficiency First" (EEF1) principle. Constructive dialogue with the population, local governments, and associations could make it easier to identify already compromised areas suitable for the development of renewable energy projects. These actors should be the ones proposing the projects, instead of multinational companies. At the same time, they state it is necessary to set boundaries on the percentage of territory used for the installation of such projects, in line with other European models. Engaging in a debate on the opposition to wind energy projects are those who propose that Italy and Sardinia follow the example of the German and Danish models. The German approach to green energy is cited as an example of balance, where each region contributes based on local standards of ecological and social contexts (Pittau, 2024).

Similarly, OrthobenEssere mentions the Danish model as an example that Italy should get inspired from. In Denmark, they report, the development of the wind energy sector is driven by a model that emphasizes competition, community involvement, and fair distribution of benefits. Wind projects are selected through highly competitive public tenders, ensuring that only the most efficient and cost-effective proposals are approved. According to the organization, a key feature of the Danish approach is community participation. Citizens are encouraged to take an active role through local cooperatives or by directly purchasing shares in wind farms. This is a model that allows local communities to benefit economically from renewable energy projects, encouraging public support and shared responsibility. Moreover, Denmark ensures equity in the distribution of benefits by enforcing clear and transparent regulations and allocation criteria. These rules consider project location and the involvement of local authorities, ensuring that part of the profits from wind energy are reinvested in regional development and social initiatives, thus strengthening the link between clean energy production and community well-being.

Subconclusion

The movements selected for this study present these claims in support of their opposition. All the elements emerging from their activism contribute to a delay in achieving the green transition in the island and, more broadly, in the country. The RMT framework seeks to identify the actual efforts put into organizing and mobilizing resources, which in turn helps clarify the concrete scope of the opposition. The results from the analysis suggest that the number of movements opposing green energy projects is growing along with the demand for their implementation due to geopolitical tensions and EU guidelines. Their modalities and actions partially met the criteria expected from the framework of RMT. When it comes to intangible resources, the movements analyzed appear to be well-prepared. Examples of this include active efforts towards gaining legitimacy, frequent

publications, the availability of human resources such as volunteers, organizers, and activists who raise awareness online and offline, and the strength of their external alliances with other groups. With regards to tangible resources, shortcomings were found. Firstly, in many instances, it was unclear to find a formal structure of the movements, including names of activists, headquarters, and other practical and structural aspects that are usually a good asset, according to RMT. Only two of the movements in the timeframe analyzed provided clear and explicit strategies for fundraising. Upon examination, a few bottom-up initiatives are successful, the most relevant example being Pratobello 24. But overall, the level of success of the movements is not clear, alongside what exactly they define as their goal. Although they advance multiple proposals for just development, the movements do not seem to be overall planning for concrete ways of achieving tangible results. For the most part, it appears that throughout the timeframe analyzed, they mainly focus on spreading information.

The last paragraph in this chapter will explore how the case of the island of Sardinia relates to other instances of Postcolonial resistance to green energy project, and what their mobilization entails through the RMT lens.

Beyond Sardinia: situating the case of Sardinia among other postcolonial settings

Placing the case of Sardinia among other territories that count a significant presence of opposition to green energy projects can be achieved through the lens of Postcolonial theory and RMT. As mentioned previously, the fundamental differences between the case of Sardinia and those of Mexico, India, Australia, and Kenya are related to the absence of a colonial background in a legal sense. The selection of these few emblematic cases is aimed at employing the Postcolonial lens in understanding the action of movements in Sardinia. The movements analyzed on the island often talk of a need for “decolonizing” their land. The cases of the former colonies highlight grievances that can align with those advanced by Sardinian movements, from a Postcolonial standpoint. These grievances highlight the complexities and challenges of transitioning to sustainable energy sources and the importance of considering the socio-political context, local community involvement, and ecological impacts. Projects in Mexico, in Lake Turkana, and in the Western Ghats of India are all contested on the grounds of disrupting local livelihoods and economic activity. (Yaffe, Segal-Klein, 2023; Zárata-Toledo, 2019; Lakhanpal 2019). This is similar to the situation in Selargius, Sardinia, where the No Thyrrenian Link movement boycotts the project in favor of agricultural activities in the area, which

are being obstructed. Compensation for land use and the damages that the projects can cause can be perceived as inadequate or unfairly distributed, leading to resentment. This is a problem posed by movements in Mexico, that denounce how the process of land leasing is carried out with a lack of transparency (Zárate-Toledo, 2019), and it also happens in Sardinia, when movements like OrthobenEssere call out how it is not simple to find who is behind the decisions being made around the use of land for wind turbines (OrthobenEssere, 2024). Lakhanpal tackles the issue of employment connected to the energy project, as institutions promise local villages more jobs through their employment in construction sites. In the Western Ghats, social, economic, and environmental benefits were selectively channeled to villages based on political affiliation, and the working conditions generally did not improve (Lakhanpal 2019). A similar issue is brought on by Associazioni Riunite and Coordinamento Gallura, who share news of workers subjected to horrible conditions on wind turbine plants in Tempio Pausania. Civil society organizations in Mexico have stated that their involvement in decision-making processes is not being heard in a satisfactory manner by the government (Zárate-Toledo, 2019). Lack of consultation and consent from the local communities is also expressed by movements that operate in Sardinia, as explained in Theme 2 of the analysis. Lastly, the similarities between the cases of Mexico, India, and Kenya and that of Sardinia have to do with the environmental cost of the implementation of green energy projects. According to these movements, projects can have negative impacts on resources and ecosystems (Lakhanpal 2019), but also on cultural sites (Yaffe, Segal-Klein, 2023).

When it comes to resource mobilization, movements that oppose green energy projects question the structure and organizational forms of movements opposing green energy projects, highlighting the importance of horizontal, democratic structures and the challenges of maintaining independence from other external actors. Some movements may decide to employ horizontal organizational structures designed for direct participation and sharing of information (Dunlap and Arce, 2022). This way, active participation is the main source of action. This type of organization may be informal, in defiance of traditional top-down structures. For example, when it comes to Sardinian movements, most are actively organizing events and sharing information through social media platforms like Facebook. Alliances and networks are also considered a source of growth for the movements that oppose green energy projects. It is the case in Mexico where these groups joined forces with other categories like work unions and builders (Zárate-Toledo, 2019), and it is the case in Sardinia, where they explore allyship with environmental groups, workers' rights groups, and anti-militarist groups. At the same time, groups might prefer to preserve independence from political parties, as is the case for Associazioni Riunite.

Discussion

Following the guidelines provided by the European Commission (European Commission, n.d.), all EU Member States, regions, and sectors must participate in the collective effort towards an economy that is climate-neutral. Sustainable development is a priority on an environmental level, but also, through projects such as REPowerEU, a matter of security in the face of geopolitical escalation, due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. While many different reasons motivate the green transition should remain a priority in political agendas all over Europe, some may feel like top-down approaches are inappropriate and even insensitive to the needs of the most remote territories. Some may even decide to mobilize against green energy projects, as they perceive the price to pay to be too high compared to the benefits they receive in turn. This perspective gets more complex as negotiations between wealthier centers and peripheral territories of a country can't seem to find a balance that satisfies both parties. Upon inspection, the claims of the movements selected for this study are not compatible with those of movements that are based on climate change denial. What emerged from an analysis of the content they publish is that the need for a green transition and decarbonization is considered urgent and crucial for the development of the island, as well as the preservation of the planet. Instead, what they do is provide a critical view on what is a "just" green transition, one that is driven by environmental consciousness, and not by capital. In doing so, they mainly criticize companies, but they are open to dialogue with institutions and wish for more power in decision-making. They also form alliances with other environmental groups and organizations centered around social justice.

To move forward with the green transition effectively and without delay, which appears to be a shared goal between the movements analyzed and institutional actors, it is necessary to take local concerns seriously. While the transition must happen quickly, opposition is increasing, with most of the movements examined in this paper emerging since 2022. Indeed, these groups are engaged, propose alternative solutions, and express willingness to work with institutions. In response, institutional actors could make greater efforts to strengthen dialogue and better respond to local priorities. A helpful step forward could be to normalize and welcome criticism at a deeper level that goes beyond the usual institutional approaches. Throughout the process of data collection, especially on social media, it appears that people who are not directly involved in either the movements or decision-making bodies tend to overlook or dismiss this kind of opposition, viewing it as unnecessary or illegitimate. Perceptions from outside Sardinia, such as from Northern

Italy or other regions, can be shaped by biases, leading many to interpret Sardinian opposition as simply uninformed NIMBYism. Alarmed tones or emotional responses are also associated with NIMBYism (Michaud et al., 2008), therefore if the groups want to appear more legitimate, they might consider using a different code of speech. Movements perceive dismissive opinions to be rooted in historical discrimination against the island. Such confrontations can lead to greater polarization, which ultimately harms both national and regional progress. This is not to say that everyone who supports green energy projects holds the same views, but significantly, the most active movements tend to emphasize these issues. At the core, all these movements challenge how the green transition is being carried out. If the transition is to succeed, especially in areas where the legacy of internal colonialism still has an impact, these concerns must be addressed. The movements examined in this study raise important questions about what a "just" green transition should look like. Their arguments appear grounded in long-standing issues and are expressed through demands that are not only environmental but also social and political. Another element that could be improved in order to avoid significant delays in the green transition is addressing concerns of a lack of transparency in terms of who mandates and benefits from energy projects. Movements often critique "energy speculation" because they see the implementation of projects as a result of a negotiation between multinational companies and mainland Italy. However, the issue could be mitigated through a more thorough screening process that ensures clarity and local involvement.

From the perspective of RMT, there are aspects that these movements could strengthen to be more effective in influencing institutions and gaining credibility. As a sample of the many small movements active across Sardinia, those analyzed here often collaborate, share resources, such as human capital, and share one another's content online. However, their organizational structure tends to be fragmented. Many lack formal frameworks or clear visibility. Their efforts focus mainly on spreading information and organizing protests, yet their constructive ideas could gain more attention with improved organization and communication strategies. A notable strength is their ability to bring together a wide range of voices, such as activists, journalists, legal experts, and historians, at public events. These are valuable resources that could be more effectively implemented with better tools, such as high-quality videos or clearer messaging platforms. As of today, many lack basic online infrastructure, like websites detailing their goals or methods. While social media, especially Facebook, is used actively, relying solely on this platform may limit reach, particularly in Italy, where Facebook is mainly used by older users, potentially reinforcing the perception that these movements are out of step with broader trends. Bottom-up movements and top-down institutions each have their own strength. The former, as shown in this project, has resources and insight. The latter has not only

resources, but also structure and goals, whether it is on a national or supranational level. The urgent status of the green transition requires both parties to work together in synergy, with mutual respect.

Framing the issue of land use in marginalized territories in Europe as a postcolonial one allows us to review how Eurocentric standards can be hurtful not only to the former colonies, which are the direct victims of this system, but also to Europe. The mindset of exploitation is historically embedded in European culture; decolonizing the white European mind is a priority. Cases like the one in Sardinia represent that if not addressed, they could end up having irreversible consequences on the planet. On this point, I refer the reader to the works of the scholar Aníbal Quijano, who extensively contributed to the notion of “coloniality of power” and implications of Eurocentrism over racialized communities (Quijano and Ennis, 2000). I also refer the reader to the works of the French feminist scholar Françoise Vergès, who identifies the Eurocentric colonialist mind as the root of both violence towards the former colonies in the past and marginalized communities in modern-day France (Vergès, 2022). In conclusion, questioning Eurocentric historical values constitutes a key aspect for a just and long-term sustainable green transition. This includes central governments addressing and taking into account the claims of peripheral territories, and encouraging bottom-up action and participation, even when it means conflict in the short term.

Conclusion

The analysis of the contents published by Sardinian social movements selected for this study, and the coverage of the issue in the media, revealed the multi-layered nature of opposition to green energy projects on the island. Sardinia stands out as a relevant case study where historical grievances, including economic marginalization and systemic delegitimization of local demands, resurface in new forms through environmental conflicts. As discussed in the background chapter, Sardinia’s historical relationship with the Italian mainland has been shaped by exclusion and prejudice, including cultural and linguistic assimilation, which continue to influence how Sardinians organize and articulate their claims today. The movements examined in this study express a desire not only for environmental justice but for cultural recognition and political agency. Under the lens of RMT, these movements exhibit strong intangible resources: they are driven by motivated activists who forcefully reject NIMBY accusations. These groups advocate for a participatory model that takes local livelihoods, cultural heritage, and environmental knowledge into account. This stance is reinforced through alliances with anti-militarist groups, environmental collectives, and labor movements, reflecting a

broad, even intersectional critique. The movements analyzed don't exhibit the same strengths when it comes to clear and transparent structures, such as a physical basis and leaders. In general, there haven't been many instances where the movements even requested to be funded, which weakens the impact of their activism. Except for some participation through petitions and formal requests to the government, their goals seem to be confined to raising awareness on the issues of the exploitation of land. The movements selected for this study represent a sample from a greater pool of small groups. While separated and small groups can address the needs of specific territories, a more structured operational strategy that involves cooperation and joint resources across movements could be an asset when it comes to taking action.

The case of Sardinia aligns with other postcolonial struggles across the globe which, also oppose the imposition of energy projects, specifically those of Mexico, India, and Kenya. While Sardinian movements share some similarities with those in other postcolonial settings, they differ in the sense that the island is not a former colony in the legal sense. The use of the term "decolonization" by Sardinian activists reflects not a legal colonial past, but a symbolic and functional condition of internal colonialism. This framework helps to critically assess the justice of imposed development models and their effects on marginalized regions. The application of RMT further highlights both the strengths and limitations of these movements. Their use of social media platforms, especially Facebook, enables effective and quick communication and information-sharing. However, the alarmist tone, the absence of high-quality video content, and the outdated elements of their social media presence may influence how their claims are perceived by audiences.

Given the growing geopolitical urgency behind energy independence in Europe, the EU has intensified efforts to implement renewable energy infrastructure across all member states. The Sardinian case reminds us that the success of green transition policies cannot be measured only by megawatts installed, but also by the degree to which they are inclusive, democratic, and respectful of territorial identity.

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Appendix

	<i>Theme 1: Historical Grievances and Power Dynamics: Economic Marginalization of Sardinia by Mainland Italy</i>	<i>Theme 2: Demand for involvement of Civil Society Organizations in the decision- making processes</i>	<i>Theme 3: Perception of the green transition</i>
<i>Blogs - written content</i>	Orthobenessere. (2022). Il problema della speculazione energetica, problematiche e proposte.	Pratobello: storia di una vittoria del popolo sardo. nd. Assemblea natzionale sarda.	Orthobenessere. (2022). Il problema della speculazione energetica, problematiche e proposte.
<i>Newspapers – Written content</i>	P. Carc Sardegna. (2024, April 29). Intervista a Luigi Pisci, attivo nei comitati di lotta contro la speculazione energetica in Sardegna. [Interview].	Ferrelli, L. (2024, December 19). Tyrrhenian Link: “La nostra lotta continua oltre lo sgombero del presidio degli ulivi”. Italia che cambia. Pratobello 24, raccolte più di 210mila firme: « Risultato eccezionale, la politica rispetti la volontà dei cittadini» . 2024 september 30. Redazione Sardegna che cambia. (2024, 5 settembre). Che cosa propone la legge di Pratobello? Italia che cambia.	Pratobello 24, raccolte più di 210mila firme: « Risultato eccezionale, la politica rispetti la volontà dei cittadini» . 2024 september 30.

	<p><i>Theme 1:</i></p> <p><i>Historical Grievances and Power Dynamics: Economic Marginalization of Sardinia by Mainland Italy</i></p>	<p><i>Theme 2:</i></p> <p><i>Demand for involvement of Civil Society Organizations in the decision-making processes</i></p>	<p><i>Theme 3:</i></p> <p><i>Perception of the green transition</i></p>
<p><i>Social Media (Facebook) written content</i></p>	<p>Coordinamento Gallura contro la speculazione eolica e fotovoltaica; posts from 11.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Comitato di difesa del territorio - No Tyrrhenian Link; posts from 11.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Associazioni Riunite - contro la speculazione energetica; posts from 12.2022 to 05.2025</p>	<p>Associazioni Riunite - contro la speculazione energetica; posts from 12.2022 to 05.2025</p> <p>Comitato di difesa del territorio - No Tyrrhenian Link 11.2023 to 05.2025</p>	<p>Coordinamento Gallura contro la speculazione eolica e fotovoltaica; posts from 11.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Associazioni Riunite - contro la speculazione energetica; posts from 12.2022 to 05.2025</p>

	<i>Theme 4: Mobilization: practical aspects, obstacles and organization</i>	<i>Theme 5: Alliances with other movements and political actors</i>	<i>Theme 6: Future visions and long-term goals</i>
<i>Blogs - written content</i>	<p>Orthobenessere. (2022). Il problema della speculazione energetica, problematiche e proposte.</p> <p>Ferrel, L. (2024, December 19). Tyrrhenian Link: "La nostra lotta continua oltre lo sgombero del presidio degli ulivi". Italia che cambia. Orthobenessere. (n.d.). Partecipa.</p>		<p>Orthobenessere. (2022). Il problema della speculazione energetica, problematiche e proposte. https://www.orthobenessere.com/problema-eolico-in-sardegna/</p> <p>Pittau, M. (2024, November 26). The battle over wind energy in Sardinia. Maurizio Pittau.</p>

	<i>Theme 4: Mobilization: practical aspects, obstacles and organization</i>	<i>Theme 5: Alliances with other movements and political actors</i>	<i>Theme 6: Future visions and long-term goals</i>
<i>Social Media (Facebook) Written content</i>	<p>Comitato di difesa del territorio - No Tyrrhenian Link; posts from 11.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Coordinamento Gallura contro la speculazione eolica e fotovoltaica; posts from 11.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Comitato Su Entu Nostu; posts from 06.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Associazioni Riunite - contro la speculazione energetica; posts from 12.2022 to 05.2025</p>	<p>Coordinamento Gallura contro la speculazione eolica e fotovoltaica; posts from 11.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Comitato Su Entu Nostu; posts from 06.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Associazioni Riunite - contro la speculazione energetica; posts from 12.2022 to 05.2025</p>	<p>Coordinamento Gallura contro la speculazione eolica e fotovoltaica; posts from 11.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Comitato Su Entu Nostu; posts from 06.2023 to 05.2025</p> <p>Associazioni Riunite - contro la speculazione energetica; posts from 12.2022 to 05.2025</p>